Storytrails

CHOOSE YOUR OWN PLOT

Allen Sharp

THE KING'S MISSION

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Can **you** rescue a victim from the 'Great Terror'?

Allen Sharp

ÇAĞDAŞ KİTABEVİ
ABC KİTABEVİ
SAMSUN ACENTASI
Çiftlik Mahallesi
Şevketiye Cad. No. 61
Tel. : 34329 SAMSUN

Cambridge University Press

Cambridge
London New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
296 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park, Melbourne 3206, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1982

First published 1982
Reprinted 1983 (twice)

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 81 – 10253

British Library cataloguing in publication data
Sharp, Allen
The king's mission. – (Storytrails)
I. Title II. Series
823'.914 [J] PZ7
ISBN 0 521 28498 8

Storytrails by Allen Sharp

Invitation to Murder
Night of the Comet
Terror in the Fourth Dimension
The Deadly Trap
The Dirty Dollars
The Evil of Mr Happiness
The Haunters of Marsh Hall
The King's Mission
The Stone of Badda
The Tomb of Amenosis

Drawings by Trevor Ridley
Map by Reg Piggott
Cover illustration by David Parkins and Trevor Ridley

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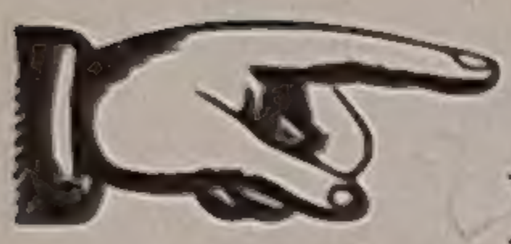

This book may be like no book that you have read before, because **you** decide the story. It is just like having an adventure in real life. What happens in the book happens to **you**. You decide what to do next and, like a real-life adventure, the end may not always be a happy one. That is up to **you**.

There are plenty of thrills and scares and you will have lots of chances to decide what you would do if you were really caught up in the adventure.

Your adventure is set in France in the spring and summer of 1794, in those months of the French Revolution that became known as the 'Great Terror'. During this time thirteen hundred men and women were carried in open carts through the streets of Paris to be beheaded on the guillotine.

A few people were saved from the 'Terror' and smuggled out of France by a handful of brave men and women. If you wonder what it might have been like to be one of those rescuers, then read on, following the simple instructions printed opposite.

How to use your book

The left-hand pages are numbered in the top left-hand corner. Flick the edge of your book through your fingers and you will see that the numbers are easy to find.

You start reading on the page marked 1 and when you come to the end of the opposite page it will tell you where to go next. As you go through the book, there will be times when you have to make a choice about what to do next. As you come to the end of the page you will see what the choice is. You choose what you are going to do by turning to the number of the page shown in brackets beside your choice.

Example: 'Did I use my false papers (**14**), or did I make a run for it (**12**)?'

If you decide to use your papers, then you will turn to page 14. If you decide to run, then you will turn to page 12.

There is a map at the beginning of the book which may help you to keep your head! Even if you know Paris today you may need the map since Paris was rather different in 1794.

To be completely successful on your adventure, you must rescue the Marquis de Sal and return him safely to England. If you fail the first time, you can try again.

Now turn to page 1 – and good luck on your mission!

PARIS IN 1794

1

It had been a long winter and, though it was already April, the snows were only just melting. Sheets of water covered the ruts and deep holes in the road and my mare had already stumbled several times. Ten miles out of Norwich, I turned off the turnpike road and onto one of the coach roads which led to the Bredon estate.

The turnpike had been bad enough. The coach road was worse. I could do without my mare breaking an ankle, or being thrown from her back. I remembered the copse over to my left. Once through it, I knew I could cut across the park to Craystone Manor. That way promised to be quicker and safer.

I often used this mare for hunting. She took the stone wall which separated the copse from the road in her stride and we were into the trees.

I had expected to meet no-one and was not prepared for the man who ran from the trees and stood in our path. The mare reared on her hind legs so that it was all that I could do to keep my seat and to hold her.

'You fool!' I shouted. 'Do you want both of us killed?'

He stood his ground. He was a rough looking fellow with a red beard and a shock of red hair. He was carrying a stout wooden club and looked as if he might be going to use it. I noticed that the right hand which grasped the club had its little finger missing. I slid my hand into my coat and closed my fingers onto the butt of one of my pistols.

'You're on private land,' he said.

'I know I am. I'm on Lord Bredon's estate, and when I get to Craystone Manor, his lordship will hear how his guests are treated by his servants.'

The man decided that I was telling the truth.

'I does beg your pardon,' he said. 'Been havin' a lot o' trouble with poachers lately.'

'Then you must have the best-dressed poachers in England!' I told him, angrily.

I dug my spurs into the mare harder than she deserved, so that the man had to spring aside as we rode on towards the Manor (2).

2

Lord Bredon was waiting for me in the library. The man with him, I had seen once before with Mr Pitt, the prime minister. I knew that he was head of the British Secret Service. Lord Bredon introduced him simply as 'Mr Brown'.

Mr Brown did all the talking.

'You know something of the revolution which is taking place in France and that last October, the French king, Louis the sixteenth, was executed by the Revolutionary Government. A number of other people were arrested at that time. One of them was the Marquis de Sal, a cousin of our gracious Queen Charlotte. Our agents tell us that the Marquis is under house arrest at his home outside Paris. They also tell us that there is a struggle for power in the Revolutionary Government. If that struggle is won by a man called Robespierre, there will be a blood bath. Many more will go to the guillotine. The Marquis could be one. You are to get him out of France.'

Lord Bredon pushed a letter across the table. I saw that it was in French and signed 'Georges Jacques Danton, for the Committee of General Security'.

'You can read it later,' said Brown. 'It is a letter of safe conduct written to a firm of Swedish arms dealers – which is why you were chosen for this mission.'

'It is true that I can speak Swedish,' I said. 'I know little about arms, except how to fire a pistol.'

'That has been arranged,' said Brown. 'Tomorrow, you leave for London. You will spend some time with a man called Ezekiel Baker at his factory in Whitechapel. Baker is one of our best gunsmiths. Next week, you will sail from Harwich to the Netherlands and from there, cross the border into France.'

That afternoon, I rode in Craystone Park with Lord Bredon's daughters, Arabella and Elizabeth. It was my first chance to ask about the red-headed man. They had heard of him from one of the grooms, but only that he was newly arrived and had been doing a good job with poachers. I said nothing of our meeting. I now had more important things on my mind, for tomorrow, I set off on the King's mission (3).

3

It was April 5th 1794, and a fine spring morning. My coach had left London before the city was awake and was headed for Harwich. I would be sailing on the evening tide for the Hook of Holland in the Netherlands.

I had slept little since leaving Craystone. It would have taken more than three days and nights to learn what had taken Ezekiel Baker a lifetime, but I had learned a great deal. I was now an 'arms dealer', and I carried a case of some of the finest pistols in Europe to prove it!

All that I wanted now was sleep and even the rattling and bumping of the coach was not going to keep me from it. When I did wake, it was because my coachman was shaking me by the shoulder.

'Are we at Harwich?' I asked him.

'Not yet. We're just north of Chelmsford, about thirty miles out of London. I wouldn't have woken you, but I think that we're being followed – a single rider, a quarter of a mile behind us. I've slowed down once or twice to let

him catch up. He's always pulled back as soon as he's caught sight of us. He's been there for the last ten miles.'

The 'coachman' was one of Mr Brown's men. If he said we were being followed, then we were, and I didn't like it.

There were two choices. We could go on. There would be one stop on the way. That could be the time to deal with our follower.

The other choice was for me to jump the coach and leave the rider following a cold trail. That meant that I couldn't sail from Harwich. It would not be too difficult to get a horse and make my way back to London. There were other ways of getting across the Channel. We might be officially at war with France, but that had not stopped the smuggling trade. Only one thing made me hesitate. Getting back to London and finding a boat could cost me two days. I could afford two days, but could the Marquis de Sal?

Did I go on (7), or leave the coach at the next likely spot (9)?

4

I was on the shore before the dawn. At first light, my ship, a three-masted lugger, appeared, like a ghost from the morning mist. A jolly boat was rowed ashore to take me on board.

The captain's name was Joseph Hawk, a surly fellow, but with sense enough to ask no questions. The mate took me to a tiny cabin, aft. It was big enough for the few hours that I expected to be aboard.

I had seen the mate eyeing the handsome case that held my pistols. In case he thought that it contained money, I made certain that he saw its contents before he left the cabin. He might think twice about robbing me if he knew that he was risking a bullet through his skull.

I stayed in my cabin for most of the day. Food was brought to me. It was plain, but wholesome. I would have liked to sleep, but thought it unwise. The wind was light and from the south and we made poor headway. In the early evening I went on deck for some air and to stretch my legs. Hawk joined me. I asked when he expected to reach the Netherlands.

'That does depend on the wind,' he said. 'See that dark line over there? That's the French coast. In a couple of hours we'll be heaving to. Come darkness, we'll slip along the coast. If the wind freshens, we could be there by dawn.'

If we were going to the Netherlands, then we were sailing an odd way round to get there. The fact that the captain's 'honest' business was smuggling might have something to do with it. I might have trusted Joseph Hawk. I couldn't say the same for the mate who I caught coming out of my cabin as I returned. He said that he was 'seeing to my needs', but I didn't think it was my needs that interested him.

At nightfall, we were hove to no more than two miles from the French coast. I didn't look forward to another sleepless night in my cabin. The jolly boat was tied to the stern and in the water. All the crew were up for'ard. Did I complete my journey as planned (**6**), or did I row ashore and take my chances on the French coast (**11**)?

5

My ship had not been long berthed at one of the quays and was still unloading cargo. She was a big, three-masted lugger, the kind much used to take light cargo and passengers to and from the north coast of Europe.

The day was cold and bright, with a light breeze coming in from the sea. We spent a pleasant hour talking and watching the bustle of the quayside.

When we got back to the inn, my coachman went to arrange for an early meal before the evening sailing. I went up to the room.

I pushed open the door and stepped half into the room. I needed to go no further to know that someone had been there. It had been well done, but not well enough. A long training had enabled me to memorise the position of every last item before I left a room. Some things had been moved, not far, but moved.

They would have found nothing of interest. My case of pistols and my papers, I had taken with me, but it was worrying to think that someone was so interested in my affairs.

I stepped the rest of the way through the doorway – and no further. The feel of cold steel across my throat persuaded me to stand where I was. Whoever had been searching the room had still been there, behind the door, and was now behind me pressing a knife against my windpipe. I couldn't see him. It might be more than my life was worth to turn my head. I cursed myself for my carelessness.

If his intention had been to kill me, he would have done it. I waited for him to speak.

He did not speak. He did make a slight groan and I felt the knife slipping away from my throat. There was a dull thud on the floor behind me. I turned around. My coachman was standing in the doorway and wiping the blood from his own knife.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I know that you would have liked him to talk, but I couldn't risk a mistake.' He ran his finger across his throat, and I knew what he meant!

We dragged the body under the bed. It would be quietly removed after I had boarded ship (8).

6

As the moon rose, the wind freshened. For the first time since leaving England, we got under way at a fair rate of knots. Through the window of my cabin I could see the white crests on the waves. The ship began to pitch and roll in the swell, and I began to feel less than well. I tried the cabin door: it was stuck. I tried it again. It was not stuck, it was locked!

I had my pistols. Any one of them would have blown the lock off. Whoever had locked the door knew that too and I was sure that they would have something in mind for me if I tried to leave the cabin. I decided to wait. I put out the lantern and laid two loaded pistols beside me. The sudden knowledge of danger had cured my sea-sickness.

No-one came to the door, but shouting on the deck took me over to the cabin window. In the brightness of the moonlight, I could make out the lines of a French frigate between ourselves and the coast. I guessed that we had been ordered to heave to, but we did not seem to be slackening speed. We were turning.

There was a flash of light from the bows of the French ship. I heard the bang and saw the fountain of water as a ball hit the water yards short of our port side. We were still turning. Our lugger, which was faster than the frigate, was making a run for it.

The French were still firing. I heard the rip of canvas and the crash of rigging as the French got our range. Our speed dropped as we lost more canvas and by the time the firing had stopped, we were just wallowing in the ocean. The shouting and running on the deck had also stopped, and I could smell smoke.

I shot the lock off the door and went onto the deck. Two men were lying near the cabin. Both were dead. All three masts had gone and the bows were ablaze. There was no sign of the rest of the crew, and the jolly boat had gone.

The ship was drifting onto the beach with the rising tide. The firing had stopped, but if there were any shore patrols, it would have brought them running. I gathered my belongings and waded ashore (11).

7

At Colchester, we stopped to change horses. Whoever was following us was likely to want to keep our coach in sight. I had not seen him, but my coachman had, more than once, if only at a distance. He was sure that he would recognise him again. While I stretched my legs in the yard at the front of the coach-house, he slipped out through the back to mingle with the crowds passing in the street outside.

He came back as the ostlers were fastening the last of the harness to the fresh horses. He was shaking his head. We both knew that it was odd, unless the man who had been following did not need to watch us because he already knew where we were going. We slowed down several times after leaving Colchester, but arrived at Harwich without having seen our man again.

I took a room at the 'Bell Inn' on the harbour. We ate a good meal and, with six hours to wait, I decided that we should take a stroll down onto the quays (5).

The Bell Inn

8

The captain greeted me as I boarded the lugger and the mate took me aft to my cabin. As I passed one of the other cabins, the door was open and I noticed luggage on the floor. It was not the kind of luggage that might belong to the crew. I asked the mate if we had other passengers. He said not, that I was the only one travelling on this trip. I asked when he expected to reach Holland. He said that it was difficult to tell. With the wind as light as it was, it could be next evening, or later.

The cabin was small, but enough for my needs and I slept well. The next morning was cold and misty and I kept to my cabin for most of the day. The wind had not picked up and, at times, we seemed to be making hardly any headway.

As evening approached, I went on deck. I asked the mate how near we were to reaching land. He pointed over to starboard. There was still a slight mist, but I could just make out a dark line on the horizon.

'That's the Hook of Holland,' he said. 'We'll be there in two to three hours.'

I stood for a time, watching the sunset. The mist was clearing and I could see the coastline more clearly. I knew the coastline of the Netherlands quite well and what I was looking at did not look like the Hook of Holland. If I had had to make a guess, I would have said that it was the north coast of France.

I was beginning to feel uncomfortable. I was already certain that there was another passenger aboard. The cabin where I had seen the luggage had been kept locked ever since, but, as I'd come on deck, I had seen one of the crew carrying away a half-eaten plate of food, and it wasn't mine! And what were we doing off the French coast?

It was near dark and the shore was no more than two miles distant. There was a jolly boat in the water, tied to the stern. All the crew were up for'ard. I wouldn't get a better chance to row ashore and take my chances (11). On the other hand, I might be getting just too suspicious. In two hours I could be in Holland (6).

9

Half a mile ahead, the road wound through trees and bushes. The coach slowed down and I was out and into the bushes. It was about a minute later when the rider passed my hiding place. I could have brought him down with one pistol shot, but it amused me to let him ride on.

I cut back across the fields towards Chelmsford. I found a farm and bought myself a horse. It wasn't worth the ten guineas that I paid, but it was a high spirited beast and would get me back to London. There was little hurry. I would not find the man I wanted to see until evening.

It was still light as I made my way back through the streets of Whitechapel that I had left only that morning. I was heading for the river at Wapping, a place where you could have murder done for a guinea, and get your own throat cut for much less.

In Wapping High Street, I found an urchin sitting amongst the filth in the gutter and gave him a shilling to look after my horse, and, to make sure he didn't sell it, the promise of half a sovereign when I returned.

A narrow, twisting alley led from the street to Wapping Stairs and the Thames. At the top of the stairs was an inn, 'The Town of Ramsgate'.

I had been born in London and I knew the characters of Wapping like my own family. The night was young, but the inn was full. I recognised some of the regulars, Groggy Sam, Jack Ratlin and Wapping Meg. Some sailors who had drunk more than was good for them were doing a hornpipe to fiddling that sounded like fighting cats. The man I was looking for was sitting in his usual corner with a pot of ale. He was not yet drunk.

Known to everyone as 'The Parson', his real name was Ned Billings. He'd been press-ganged into the Navy. His young captain, Nelson, had given him enough of a taste for the sea to start his own business, smuggling. He'd got the nickname 'The Parson' from the times he'd escaped the customs men by dressing as a country clergyman. Billings knew every rogue on the river and there was nothing he couldn't get done – for a price (**10**).

10

Billings owed me a few favours. I told him just as much as he needed to know. He left the inn, returning about an hour later.

'It's fixed,' he said. 'A friend of mine what does a bit of honest business across the channel is sailing for Holland on the morning tide. He'll pick you up off the shore at Foulness Point.'

The price was ten guineas, plus my horse. I readily agreed, though when I went back for the horse, both it and the urchin had vanished.

Billings decided that he would take another five guineas instead of the horse with, as he said, 'little profit to myself, but as a favour to you, and it being a mission for King George hisself, God bless him!' I was quite certain that Ned now had my fifteen guineas and my horse, less half a sovereign to the urchin!

At a little after midnight, Billings himself rowed me down the Thames in a boat with well-muffled oars. There was a deserted cottage near to the shore. My bed was clean straw and Billings left me a blanket and a lantern (4).

TOWN
OF
BRAMSGATE

11

The sandy beach shone white in the moonlight and I made for the shadow of the dunes. Beyond the dunes was a rough track and, not far off, across the fields, a light twinkled in the window of a house. The house was a farm, and a farm meant horses.

I stole a rope from one of the barns and took a horse from a field behind the house. The beast might have been more at home in the shafts of a cart than ridden bareback with a rope bridle, but I began a slow ride away from the coast.

Soon I found a better road and a milestone, marked 'Lille' on one side and 'Calais' on the other. If this was the road from Calais to Lille, then a few miles further on I knew there was an inn called 'Le Coq d'Or'. The landlord was a British agent.

The inn was still busy when I got there. I didn't want to be seen, and especially not on a stolen horse! I dismounted, led the animal off the road and, using the shadow of a hedge, worked my way round to the back of the inn. I tied the horse to a tree and, when things looked quiet,

slipped into the kitchens. At least I had got myself a bed for the night!

The landlord and I talked over breakfast. There would be roadblocks all the way from here to Paris. If I could think of a good reason for being in this part of northern France, then the quickest way through them was to use my safe conduct signed by Danton. That was when I heard the bad news. Danton had been executed as a traitor just two days before. So how safe was my safe conduct now? I could get to Paris without it, but it would take much longer and it would not be without its risks.

Breakfast was interrupted by a loud hammering on the inn door. A potman ran into the kitchens to say that a troop of the French National Guard was outside in the front yard.

It wasn't very likely that they were looking for me. If I was going to use my 'safe conduct', then this could be a good time to do it (14). If I wasn't, then I needed to leave quickly, before the inn door was broken down (12)!

12

I needed a horse. The animal which had brought me the night before was of little use and was, in any case, on its way back to the farm with the landlord's son. The story would be that it had been found straying on the road nearby. The best horse in the inn stable was the landlord's own, but now was no time to get it saddled.

The potman would take his time taking the bars and bolts from the front door while I left by the back. Beyond the stable yard of the inn was a copse. I could hide there and still see what was going on in the yard. When things were quiet, the landlord would saddle the horse and leave it in the yard. That would be my signal to take the horse and go. Even with the soldiers gone, the inn would soon be busy. The fewer people who saw me, the better.

The soldiers left within the hour, but another hour had passed before I saw the horse saddled and waiting in the yard. I lost no time in getting back and mounting it.

I had done no more than trot the animal across the stable yard when there was a cry from behind me of 'Stop thief!' I dug my heels into the horse's

flanks. There was a pistol shot. I felt a burning pain in my left shoulder. I held on as the animal broke into a gallop. I remembered a second shot, and then nothing more.

When I came back to my senses, I was in a bed at the 'Coq d'Or'. The landlord's son, returning from the farm where he had delivered my first horse, had seen me riding out of the yard. We had not met, nor did he know of the arrangement that I had made with his father. Thinking that I was a common thief, who had failed to stop on his challenge, he had hit me with two, well-aimed pistol shots. The shot to the head had only grazed me. The wound in the shoulder was deep and I had lain for many days in a fever. The fever passed, but the wound was slow to heal. It was weeks before I could leave my bed, and June had come before I was fit to travel.

Robespierre was now dictator of France and the Marquis de Sal was awaiting trial in the Temple Prison in Paris. I still had my 'safe conduct'. Could I use it now (**15**), or did I seek help from our agent in Paris (**17**)?

13

When I entered his office, Robespierre was standing with his back to me and was looking down from the window into the Rue Saint Honoré. He turned slowly to face me. Though plain clothes had become the fashion in Paris, this man was dressed like any aristocrat, with jacket and breeches of plum-coloured silk, a waistcoat of gold brocade and a white, powdered wig.

He stepped briskly over to his desk and picked up some papers.

'I have examined your complaints, citizen, and it would seem that your treatment has been unfortunate. I would remind you that we are fighting both a war and a revolution.'

I could see that he was not a man who made apologies. My case of pistols was also on the desk.

'You are a dealer in arms.'

'Yes,' I replied, 'of the company of Svenson and Svenson in Stockholm.'

He opened the case of pistols.

'Your pistols are very fine, but not what we need for an army. We need flintlocks and powder.'

'That can be arranged,' I told him.

'Very well. I will arrange a meeting for you with citizen Carnot. I will give you a new letter of safe conduct and the address of some lodgings which you will find to be comfortable.'

'And my pistols?' I asked.

'Will be returned to you when I have had time to examine them. You may take one for your personal protection.'

I left the office with my letter, an address and a pistol, more than a little pleased at the success of my deception.

I had crossed the street to the other side of the Rue Saint Honoré, when I noticed a man leaving the office behind me. He was dressed like other people in the street, except for a short, white wig. Apart from there being few wigs about, what made his look strange was a pair of bright red eyebrows. In every other way, his clean shaven face looked ordinary enough. I had a sudden curiosity to see where he went (22), although I knew that I should be losing no time in contacting our British agent (19).

14

The young captain of the guard did not seem to think it odd that I was travelling from Stockholm to Paris by way of Calais. It may have been because I spoke most of the time in Swedish and the rest in very bad French, that saved me from a few awkward questions, like what I was doing at Le Coq d'Or.

The captain did know that Danton had been executed. He also knew that the powerful 'Committee of General Security' for whom Danton had signed the letter, was very much alive. I was taken to Lille under military escort and there, I was held for two days in the barracks. I was pleased to hear that orders had been received to take me to Paris.

I might not have been so pleased had I known that my destination was one of the city's prisons! I protested loudly. I was a Swedish citizen and my country was not at war with France. I demanded to see someone in authority. It was no use.

Days passed. There were no 'cells' in the prison, only a large room where I lived with fifty or more other prisoners, thieves, murderers, and a few aristocrats. Just being an aristocrat in revolutionary France was enough to get one

labelled as a 'traitor' or an 'enemy of the state'. The place was filthy and the food was worse. Other than freedom, most things could be bought from the guards for money, but I had none of that.

The aristocrats spent most of their time discussing who among their friends had been arrested and what their chances were of escaping the guillotine. So it was that I heard that the Marquis de Sal had been taken from his home and moved to the Temple Prison. It was what Mr Brown had feared might happen, but there was little that I could do about it.

Weeks went by. I knew that the Marquis was still alive, but the rumour was that he would soon be brought to trial. A trial was as good as a death sentence.

On June 4th, I was taken to the office of the prison Governor. My request to see someone in authority had been considered. Nothing was said about this having taken two months. My request had been granted. The 'someone' was Maximilien Robespierre, now dictator of France, whose office was in the centre of Paris, in a street called Rue Saint Honoré (13).

15

I arrived in Paris on June 4th. I had still not used the letter from Danton. The landlord of the 'Coq d'Or' had given me papers which had got me this far, but they only showed me to be a French citizen, and even French citizens were not safe in the Paris of 1794. Anyone was being arrested on the least suspicion. I doubted whether our agent in Paris could give me anything better. I needed to move about without fear of arrest. I needed something which no-one would question, like a letter which bore the signature of Maximilien Robespierre!

Robespierre's office was in the centre of Paris, in a street called the Rue Saint Honoré. I walked past it several times to see how difficult it might be to get in. It did not seem difficult at all. Many people were walking in and out.

I was stopped in the entrance hall by a clerk who asked me to state my business. I began with a string of abuse in my best Swedish. When I thought that he was quite unnerved, I began again in rather bad French.

I showed him my letter of safe conduct and

then tore it up to show him what I thought of it. I told him that I was in France at the invitation of his Committee of General Security. It was not my concern if one of them had had his head chopped off. I asked him if France treated all her guests in this way.

It worked. He soon decided that I was much too important for him to deal with himself. He left, and returned with a man who described himself as secretary to citizen Robespierre. I told the story again, this time ending it by showing him my case of pistols.

'Those,' I said, 'are some of the finest weapons in Europe. I have sold them to kings and emperors. Never, have I received the treatment which I have received in your country.'

He was impressed. He explained that citizen Robespierre had gone to the Jacobin Club, 'only around the corner'. If I would do him the kindness of waiting, and if he might take the pistols, then he would speak to citizen Robespierre immediately upon his return. I did not have long to wait (13).

16

Prisoners at the Temple Prison were carried to and from their trial by the Tribunal at the Palais de Justice in closed carriages. A guard sat inside the carriage with the prisoner and two more followed the carriage on horseback.

Lefèvre had the idea that we might create a diversion, stop the carriage, overpower the guards and get the Marquis away before the passers-by knew what had happened. It was too risky. We needed to be more certain that our plan would work.

The carriages were often driven empty from the Palais de Justice to the prison. They were joined by the guards at the prison, when the prisoner was brought out. I asked Lefèvre if we could provide a carriage, exactly like the ones which were used, and a driver.

'We are carriage makers!' said Lefèvre. 'We can quickly alter one. The driver might be bribed, or we can arrange an "accident" for the real driver and use one of our own.'

I examined the carriage which was to be altered. There had to be enough room under one

of the seats to hide a man. I was told that it would be simple. The next thing that I wanted might not be so simple: a life-size dummy which looked like the Marquis.

Lefèvre laughed.

'Then surely,' he said, 'you have come to the right place! One of our friends works for a young Swiss woman called Marie Tussaud. She makes wax figures, and has an exhibition in Paris. They say that they have been mistaken for real people!'

The work had to start at once. We had to find out the time at which the Marquis would leave the prison. We had also to get a message to him to be prepared for anything which might happen on his journey, and to do what he was told, quickly, and without question. As well as the carriage, I needed two handcarts, two small barrels of gunpowder, and a load of vegetables!

Paris was about to see the Marquis de Sal killed before their very eyes, and before he ever got to his trial (**24**)!

17

I arrived in Paris on June 4th. Forged papers, given to me by the landlord of the 'Coq d'Or', had got me that far. They showed me to be a French citizen, a merchant of the town of Lille.

The man who I wanted to meet was Jean Lefèvre, the owner of a firm of carriage makers, whose workshops were in the centre of Paris, just behind a street called Rue Saint Honoré.

Rue Saint Honoré was one of the busiest and most important streets in Paris. Amongst other things, it housed the National Assembly, the government of Revolutionary France, and the private office of France's new dictator, Maximilien Robespierre.

I turned off the main street and down a side turning towards the workshops. Beyond a pair of large gates was a yard in which several carriages were standing. Also standing in the yard was a group of National Guardsmen. That was no surprise. I had no doubt that Lefèvre numbered the army among his customers.

I could have walked in, but thought it better to wait and walked back to the Rue Saint Honoré.

There was a café across the street. From it, I could see down the side street and would also see when the army officers left Lefèvre's yard. After twenty minutes, they did leave.

I had started to cross the street again, when I noticed a man standing on the corner opposite to me. He was dressed very much like other people in the street, except that he wore a short white wig. Wigs were not now common in Paris, but it was not so much the wig which caught my attention, as what was beneath it – a pair of very bright red eyebrows.

The man looked quite ordinary in every other way, clean shaven and plainly, but neatly dressed. Perhaps it was that I had seen him before, maybe in the café, but there was something about him that made me think that I would like to know where he was going and what he was about (**22**). Nevertheless, the side street was clear and I knew that I could afford to waste no time in contacting Lefèvre (**19**).

18

The company of Marcel Lefèvre had been carriage makers to the kings of France for a hundred years. In that time, the yard and the workshops behind the Rue Saint Honoré had changed little, though the words 'to the King' had been painted out on the sign over the gates.

Jean Lefèvre, grandson of Marcel, and the present owner, had no love for the revolution. He had seen many of his best friends, and his best customers, sent to the guillotine. Since the king's execution, he had worked for the British.

It was now late evening and the yard was closed. Six of us were met in a small room over one of the workshops, Lefèvre, myself, three men from the workshops, and a boy, no more than ten years old.

Lefèvre saw me looking at the boy.

'He's all right,' he said. 'We took him in off the streets with no memory of who he is or where he came from. We call him "République", a safe name to have in Paris today. You can trust him.'

He took the clay pipe from his mouth and laid it on the table.

'If the Marquis de Sal is in the Temple Prison, then he cannot be rescued from there. That is where the king was held.'

He spread a paper out on the table and moved the candles nearer so that it could be seen.

'He has to be moved from the prison to the Palais de Justice, where he will be tried. He will be found guilty – they all are. He will be taken back to the prison, and then to the guillotine in the Place de la Révolution. I have marked out the routes on this plan. A rescue might be easier on the way to the trial, but it gives us less time.'

'How much time?' I asked.

'Two days to the trial, three to the execution.'

'If we try the first, and fail, do we have time to try the second?'

He shook his head. There was little enough time to arrange one attempt at rescue. The choice was mine: on the way to the trial (16), or on the way to the guillotine (20)?

19

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'If we try the first and fail, do we have time to try the second?'

He shook his head. There was little enough time to arrange one attempt at rescue. The choice was mine: on the way to the trial (**23**), or on the way to the guillotine (**21**)?

20

Prisoners were carried from the Temple Prison to the guillotine in the Place de la Révolution in open carts, or 'tumbrils'. They moved at little more than walking pace and were escorted by soldiers of the National Guard on horseback.

The tumbrils were kept in a coach-house and stables a quarter of a mile from the prison. They were driven to the prison from the coach-house, empty and without escort. I asked Lefèvre whether he could make a tumbril in the time which we had, one which would pass for the real thing.

'We are carriage makers!' said Lefèvre. 'We have some carts. One can be altered to resemble a tumbril.'

I asked him about supplies of gunpowder.

'Not so easy,' he said. 'Powder is short, even for the army. How much do you want?'

I told him, at least four small barrels. He thought that that was possible. I gave him a list of the other things which I needed – as many handcarts as we had barrels of powder, and enough vegetables to cover the barrels of powder

which were to be hidden on the carts.

We would also need a change of clothing for the Marquis, and some army uniforms, at least one of them of a high ranking officer of the National Guard. I had thought that the uniforms might be difficult, but Lefèvre said that one of their friends worked for a young Swiss woman called Marie Tussaud. She had an exhibition of wax figures in Paris. Soldiers were often used in her scenes and she had a large collection of uniforms, given to her by the army!

Work had to start at once. We needed to know the exact time at which the Marquis would leave the prison. We had also to get a message to him to be prepared for anything which might happen on the journey, and to do what he was told, quickly, and without question.

The success of the plan would depend upon everyone being in the right place at the right time and knowing exactly what they had to do.

No-one had ever been rescued from a tumbril on the way to the guillotine. This was a first time, and we would have no second chances (27)!

21

I wanted to know every detail of the route. I began early the next morning by walking to the Place de la Révolution. The day's executions had not begun and only the executioner was at work, sharpening the blade of the guillotine.

The crowd which would collect might help in a rescue because of the disorder which would follow, but that same disorder might make an escape more difficult. It had to be somewhere along the way from the prison.

Prisoners were taken to the guillotine in open carts, or 'tumbrils'. Lefèvre had told me that the tumbrils were kept in a coach-house and stables a quarter of a mile from the prison. I had already thought of the idea of substituting one of our own.

There were plenty of places where a tumbril, with our own driver, might be driven off the route, but the success of such a plan hung on my being able to create the right kind of diversion. I was going through ideas in my mind, fires, explosions, runaway horses, when I felt a light tug on my sleeve.

I turned, but could not see who had done it. Then I spotted the boy, République, a little way off in the crowd of passers-by who had begun to fill the Rue Saint Honoré. He was making signs for me to follow. I looked down at my sleeve. There was blood on it!

I followed République, away from the street and into a maze of alleyways. Only when we were completely alone, did he stop and wait for me to catch up with him.

Minutes after I had left, soldiers had come to the yard. Lefèvre had been arrested. The men in the workshops had put up a fight and there had been shooting. He thought that Lefèvre was dead. The other men had been taken away by the soldiers. A man had come with the soldiers, a man with red eyebrows. He had tried to make République tell him what he knew, but the boy had bitten him and run off.

I looked at his arm. A ball from a pistol had passed clean through the flesh. I bound it up to stop the bleeding and we moved on (26).

22

I stayed where I was. The man across the street did the same. If where he was going was to follow me, then he couldn't move until I did. I began to walk down the Rue Saint Honoré towards the Tuileries Gardens.

The man was easy enough to pick out in the crowd. A glance back told me that he was behind me. I quickened my pace. He was still there. I turned into the gardens.

The revolution had done nothing for the Tuileries. The grass needed to be scythed and the rosebeds were covered in weeds. The gardens gave me just what I needed, cover to keep out of sight until I had taken a closer look at the man following me.

He passed near to the bushes where I had hidden, near enough for me to see that the little finger of his right hand was missing, as was the beard and shock of red hair which he had had when we met at Craystone Manor.

Having made certain that I had lost him, I needed to do two things, forget my 'safe conduct' and contact our agent without further delay (18).

23

I wanted to know every detail of the route. I started at the Temple Prison early the next morning. Though it was early, there were already plenty of sightseers about and it seemed safe enough to mingle with the crowd.

I did not have long to wait before a closed carriage arrived. The carriage was empty, and there were no guards with the driver. The first of the day's prisoners was brought out of the prison under guard, and placed in the carriage. One soldier got into it with the prisoner. As the carriage moved off, two more soldiers followed behind on horseback.

When I was satisfied that the same thing happened each time, I walked down the Rue du Temple, in the direction which the carriages had taken, and towards the Palais de Justice.

The Palais de Justice is on the island in the river Seine on which the great cathedral of Notre Dame also stands. The Palais could only be reached by crossing one of the bridges. The bridge the carriages took was narrow. Today there were few people on it. I was thinking that it

looked a likely spot for a rescue, when I felt a light tug on my sleeve. I turned, but could not see who had done it. Then I spotted the boy, République, a little way off in the crowd, and making signs for me to follow him. I looked down at my sleeve. There was blood on it!

I followed République away from the river and into a maze of narrow side streets and alleys. Only when we were completely alone, did he wait for me to catch up with him.

Minutes after I had left, soldiers had come to the yard. Lefèvre had been arrested. The men in the workshops had put up a fight and there had been shooting. He thought that Lefèvre was dead. The other men had been taken away by the soldiers. A man had come with the soldiers, a man with red eyebrows. He had tried to make République tell him what he knew, but the boy had bitten him and run off.

I looked at his arm. A ball from a pistol had passed clean through the flesh. I bound it up to stop the bleeding and we moved on (26).

24

I had decided to drive the carriage myself. I had a new set of forged papers, but with so many comings and goings at the prison, the guards had become very slack, and no-one asked to see them.

The Marquis was brought out and put into the carriage. A guard got in beside him. The other two guards were already mounted. We set off down the Rue du Temple.

The Palais de Justice is on the island in the river Seine on which the great cathedral of Notre Dame also stands. It can be reached only by crossing one of the bridges.

As we neared the river, I turned the carriage off the Rue du Temple and into the next street, the Rue Saint Martin. The bridge was just ahead of us.

I started looking for the first of the handcarts. It was there, loaded with vegetables, and in position at the end of the bridge. I could only hope that the other handcart, which I couldn't see, was also in position at the other end of the bridge.

The timing had to be perfect. As I came to the

bridge, the man with the handcart nearest to me would signal to another man on the roof of a building above me. He, in turn, would signal to the man on the other side of the bridge.

The times we had tried it, a trotting horse took about eighty seconds to reach the centre of the bridge. I started counting in my head. I thought we were going too fast. I slowed the horse – seventy-six, seventy-seven, seventy-eight seconds – and we were at the centre of the bridge. The barrel of gunpowder hidden under the vegetables on the cart behind me exploded. The explosion from the other end of the bridge followed a split second later. I stopped the carriage, pulling it as near to the parapet of the bridge as I could.

After the bangs, and with smoke rising from both ends of the bridge, the few people who were on the bridge were in a state of panic and the two mounted guards were having difficulty in holding their frightened horses. I pushed open the flap behind my seat and pointed a pistol at the guard inside (25).

25

The plan was to make the guard jump from the carriage into the river, but he pulled his pistol and I had no choice but to fire. I shouted my instructions to the Marquis.

He pulled out the dummy from where it was hidden under the seat, opened the carriage door and flung the dummy into the river. He then took its place under the seat.

The smoke from the explosions was clearing and more soldiers of the National Guard were running onto the bridge. The Marquis had been seen to jump. The weights in the dummy would make certain that the 'body' was not found quickly.

All that was to be seen in the carriage was a dead guard, and a pistol. The soldiers had to believe that the Marquis had shot the guard with his own pistol.

I knew that the pistol had not been fired. Could I take the risk that it was not going to be spotted (**29**), or did I whip up the horse and make a run for it now, when it was least expected (**32**)?

26

We were near to the gates of the yard. I told République to stay where he was while I took a look over the high wall which separated the yard from the street.

The yard looked to be empty. I dropped back into the street again and walked in through the gates. There were still several carriages standing around. I crouched down so that I could see beneath them. Between the wheels, I could see the bottoms of a pair of black breeches and two, white-stockinged legs. The owner was twenty yards off.

'Why do you not come out, citizen, where I can see you?' I invited.

I drew a pistol from my coat. The legs moved. A man appeared from behind one of the carriages. It was the same man who I had almost followed the day before.

I saw his hand move to his coat. I fired my pistol. The shot was meant only as a warning, but was closer than I intended. It whipped the wig from his head, showing his red hair. The

hair had been longer and the beard was gone, but this was the man who had stopped me in Craystone Park.

'Still looking for poachers?' I asked.

'Yes, citizen,' he replied, 'and it looks as if I have found one!'

He looked at my still smoking pistol and pulled out the one which he had been going to take from his coat as I fired. I knew what he was thinking, and I did nothing to stop him. Having aimed his pistol at my head, he went on.

'Of course, you know, citizen, that your letter of safe conduct is of no use to you, but what you will not know is that the man who you hoped to save was tried last night, found guilty, and is being executed at this very moment. Your own execution is about to follow.'

What *he* did not know, not having spent three days with Ezekiel Baker, was that the pistol which I held had two barrels, one beneath the other. The second barrel was still loaded. I fired it in time to stop my own execution!

27

The real tumbril, which was to collect the Marquis from the Temple Prison, left the coach-house on time. Just outside the yard, it was stopped by a soldier who said that he was late for duty and begged a ride. The 'soldier' was one of Lefèvre's men and a pistol held at the back of the driver persuaded him to go in a different direction.

At the same time, I set off from a few streets away, driving our own tumbril. It did look like the real thing, but it was built to stand the roughest of driving without falling to pieces. The horse in the shafts had been dirtied down with mud to look like an old nag. It was the fastest horse in Lefèvre's stable.

I had new forged papers, but with so many comings and goings at the prison, the guards had become slack and no-one asked to see them. The Marquis, his hands tied, was brought out and placed in the tumbril. There were six mounted guards who took up their positions, two in front, two behind and one on either side. We set off at a brisk walking pace down the Rue du Temple.

Many of the citizens of Paris were spending

their days in the Place de la Révolution watching the endless executions of the hated aristocrats and other 'enemies of the Republic'. Those who had not the time, or the stomach, lined the streets to shout and jeer at the prisoners as they rode past. I had to do my own share, throwing my red beret into the air and shouting 'Down with the aristocrats!' and 'Vive la République!'

We were getting near to the place where things were going to happen. There was the sound of an explosion, not too far distant. The shouting and jeering stopped and the people in the street began to talk with each other, wondering what had happened. There was a second explosion, this time much nearer.

Some unrest had started in the crowd and people were beginning to wonder whether they might be in some kind of danger themselves.

It was at that moment that the boy, République, ran from the crowd into the middle of the street in front of the tumbril. He was shouting, 'They have attacked the National Assembly! Robespierre is dead! The Jacobin Club is on fire!' **(28)**.

28

From the side street down which we were to make our escape rode three soldiers, one a captain, and all of them Lefèvre's men. The crowd scattered to let them through. Our way was now open.

The 'captain' shouted to our escort.

'You two at the rear! Stay with the prisoner. The rest of you to the Rue Saint Honoré, and quickly!' There were two more explosions and smoke could be seen rising over the buildings from the direction of the Rue Saint Honoré. The soldiers galloped off.

There were now only two soldiers behind us and a clear way in front. On the corner of the street down which we were to turn was another of our carts of vegetables, with a barrel of powder under them. It had to explode seconds after we passed it, holding up any pursuit. I could see the man who was to light the fuse. He had been carried away from the cart in the struggling crowd! Was the fuse lit? If it was not, we would be quickly pursued. If it was lit and I held back, we could be blown to pieces.

Did we go (33), or did I hold back (31)?

29

I climbed down from the driver's seat. The two mounted guards had climbed down from their horses and had begun to remove the body of their dead comrade from inside the carriage. The soldiers who had run onto the bridge were lining the parapet, hoping to see the Marquis. Others had started to row out from the bank to help in the search.

I picked up the pistol from the floor of the coach. As I did so, I tipped the powder that sets off the main charge in the pistol out of the pan. Then I gave it to one of the guards. The gun now looked as if it had been fired, and it might be a long time before someone discovered that it was still loaded.

No-one had any doubt of what had happened. They had seen it for themselves! The Marquis had drowned, they said. It would save having a trial. It was a pity about the guard, but it was his own fault if he was foolish enough to let an unarmed man take his pistol.

The bridge had to be cleared. I was told to

drive the coach back to the Palais de Justice.

While I drove, the Marquis came out of hiding and changed into some clothes which had been hidden with the dummy. I stopped a little short of the Palais. My passenger got down and, for the benefit of passers by, thanked me for the ride, and walked off. I too, climbed down and walked off, as if towards the coach-house.

When I got back to Lefèvre's carriage works, the Marquis had arrived and was well hidden away. For the present, he was officially dead. Even if anyone did work out what had really happened, then the last place that they would look was in the very centre of Paris, only a stone's throw from the office of Maximilien Robespierre.

The rescue had been successful and, for the moment, we were safe. The task had not yet ended. I still had what could prove an even harder problem. I had to find some way of getting the Marquis out of Paris, across France and safely over the Channel to England (**30**).

30

In the next days, things in Paris became much worse. This was the time which was to become known as the 'Great Terror' with as many as thirty people going to the guillotine each day. No-one trusted anyone. Anyone accused of being a 'traitor' was as good as dead.

It helped us in one way. There had been no time for any enquiry into what had happened to the Marquis de Sal, or who had been responsible.

Lefèvre wanted us to stay where we were until things had cooled down, but I would not take the risk, not only to the Marquis, but to Lefèvre. Soldiers were always searching for someone. If I or the Marquis were found in the carriage works, then Lefèvre and his friends would be joining the queue for the guillotine in the Place de la Révolution.

As for ways out of the city, the river was too well guarded. It had to be one of the entrances to the city. They too were guarded, but too many people passed in and out for everyone to be carefully searched and questioned.

There was still one of our number who could

move around the city without danger, the boy République. Looking like any of the hundreds of other urchins, he had visited every entrance, noting when and where there was most traffic. On Thursday mornings, farmers brought food to the Paris markets. So much time was spent in searching their carts and waggons, that there was little time spent on those leaving the city.

I could pass as a French peasant, but the Marquis could not. To get him out, he would have to be hidden on a farm cart. Hiding someone on an empty cart might not be too easy.

The other way was to give him a new name and new papers. The Marquis was not a young man, and though he had done well in his escape, his months of imprisonment, together with the loss of most of his friends and family, had taken their toll. Could he stand up to the kind of careful questioning which might happen if we were unlucky? Would he break down and give us away?

Was it to be the farm cart (34), or false papers (37)?

31

I thought that the fuse could not be lit. I looked for the man who was to light it. The crowd had forced him even farther away from the handcart. The two soldiers behind could move me on at any moment. The plan had gone wrong, but it wasn't finished. I had surprise on my side, and a good horse.

I cracked the whip and shouted to the Marquis to throw himself flat on the tumbril. We swung towards the corner on two wheels. As we passed the cart, I caught sight of a wisp of smoke from amongst the vegetables. The fuse was lit!

I crouched low in the driver's seat. The blast from the explosion rocked me on the seat and seared my back with the heat. The horse took fright and bolted.

The plan had been to pull the tumbril into a nearby yard where the real tumbril and driver were still waiting at pistol point. Having taken our place, our pursuers would be following the wrong tumbril.

We reached the entrance to the yard, but the

horse was still going at full gallop and I could neither slow it down nor turn it.

Only because the tumbril was so strongly built did it hold together as we bounced and swayed over the rough cobbles. I glanced back. Smoke was still covering the end of the street. There was still a chance.

I let the horse have its head, knowing that if only I could keep the tumbril on the road, the horse must tire in the end. We had covered some distance before the gallop became a trot and I was able to pull the horse to a halt. We had come through a maze of narrow alleys and, if nothing else, had lost our pursuers. I could hear no sound of horses.

The Marquis was still lying flat in the tumbril. I knew that he must have had a rough ride. I got down from the driver's seat and went round to the back of the tumbril to help him out. It was then that I saw he was dead, caught in the full blast of the explosion.

32

The two guards who had been riding with the carriage had got their horses under control. I didn't know whether they had heard my pistol shot, but they must come to find out what had happened to the guard in the carriage. The soldiers who had run onto the bridge had seen the 'Marquis' jump. They were lining the parapet of the bridge and looking down into the river, while others had rowed out in a boat to help in the search.

I whipped up the horse and we took off at a fair gallop. No-one was expecting it. No-one tried to stop us. We were off the other end of the bridge before the first shot was fired. I heard a ball whistle past my ear. I kept my head down and drove on.

For the moment, we were out of sight. I had to give the Marquis time to change into clothes which had been hidden with the dummy. I headed for the coach-house of the Palais de Justice. The best place to hide a carriage is with six others just like it.

There was a risk, but no more than staying on the streets. Carriages moved in and out of the coach-house all day long and no-one gave me more than a glance as I drove in.

I had to make certain that no-one opened the doors of the carriage. The Marquis, I might explain. A dead guard could be more difficult.

I waited until there was no-one near before I opened one of the doors. I expected only to have to let the Marquis out and walk off.

The dead guard was on the floor. There was no Marquis. I couldn't understand why he had not had the sense to come out of hiding and get himself changed. I got into the carriage and lifted the seat. The Marquis was still there – dead. A musket ball had passed clean through the back of the carriage and into the space where he was hiding.

There was no more that I could do. I walked away, leaving the carriage and the two bodies inside it.

33

There was no real choice. I had to make a run for it. The only risk was being pursued. If we stayed, we might end up shot, anyway.

I whipped up the horse, shouting as I did so for the Marquis to throw himself flat in the tumbril. Hoofs clattered on the cobbles as we swung into the side street on one pair of wheels. I saw a wisp of smoke from amongst the vegetables. The fuse was lit!

I crouched low in the driver's seat. I felt the blast of hot air from the explosion sweep over me. The horse shied, but I held it. I looked back. The Marquis was still there behind me and a cloud of smoke had blotted out the end of the street.

Fifty yards farther on, I swung the tumbril off the street and into a yard which we had picked out for the purpose. Waiting in the yard was the real tumbril with the real driver, still held at pistol point. As we drove in, the real tumbril drove out.

The smoke could be clearing from the end of the street and the pursuers would still be able to

see the tumbril – the wrong one! Our man would jump off long before the pursuers had caught up, and by the time anyone knew what had happened, we would be long gone.

The Marquis and I changed our clothes and made our way out through the building at the back of the yard and into another street. We walked off in opposite directions.

When I got back to Lefèvre's carriage works, the Marquis had arrived and was well hidden away. For the present, he was safe. There would be a search, but Paris was a big place, and the last place that they would expect to find him was somewhere almost on the doorstep of the office of Maximilien Robespierre.

The rescue had been successful and no-one had been hurt in the process, apart from some singed hair and minor burns among those who had been too near to our carts of vegetables.

The task was not finished. I now had to get the Marquis out of Paris, across France and safely over the Channel to England (30).

34

By mid morning on Thursdays, the farm carts which had come to the city first were leaving it. Farmers from farther off were still arriving and most of the searching was of the full carts coming in, and not the empty ones going out.

Lefèvre's skill as a carriage maker had been used for a second time. A handcart had been made with high sides and a false bottom, with just enough space beneath it to hide a man. On the ground, it would fool nobody, but roped onto the top of a horse-drawn farm cart, it could be placed so that it was possible to see under it, and by walking round the cart, to see into it. Seen this way, the difference in depth between the inside and the outside could not be noticed.

We had chosen an entrance on the north side of the city, because it was the busiest. I was stopped and my papers were examined while two soldiers walked around the cart. They hardly glanced at the handcart. It was obviously empty!

I was waiting for my papers to be given back to

me when I spotted, a little way off, a face that I knew too well, or perhaps not the face, but the red eyebrows! The man was talking to two other soldiers and was not looking my way. They stopped talking. The man stayed where he was and the two soldiers began to walk towards me.

The barrier across the road had been opened to let through an incoming cart. There was room for me to drive past it. It would not be open for long.

I knew that I looked very different from the time when the man with the eyebrows had followed me into the Tuileries Gardens. He was not looking my way, though the two soldiers were still coming towards me. It could be that they had no interest in me, or my carts.

I continued to wait for my papers. At any moment the barrier would be closed again and it would be too late. I had to decide now. Should I make a run for it through the barrier (40), or should I wait (42)?

35

I opened the door of our room. The Marquis was still sleeping. As I walked into the room, I heard the door being closed behind me.

'I shouldn't go for your pistol!' said a voice behind me. 'Take it out gently. Drop it on the floor, and then you may turn around.'

I did as I was bidden. I don't think that I was too surprised to see myself face to face with the man with the red eyebrows. He pointed to a chair with his pistol.

'Sit,' he said.

I sat. He sat himself in another chair at the other side of the room. He removed his white wig. His hair was cut short, but was as red as his eyebrows.

'You've done well,' he said.

'Not well enough,' I replied. 'I should have known that getting out of Paris was too easy. I suppose that was your doing.'

He nodded his head.

'Why?' I asked him.

'Because I enjoy the chase better than the kill.'

'And this is the kill?' I asked

'No,' he said. 'I am here to make you an offer.'

He lowered his pistol.

'There is news from Paris. Robespierre has been arrested and tried. He will go to the guillotine. When Danton was executed, the men closest to him went with him. I am Robespierre's man. My own life is now in danger.'

'What is your offer?' I asked.

'My life, in exchange for your own and that of your friend. We are both in the same business, you and I. Give me your guarantee of my safety and freedom in England, and I will arrange our escape. I still have power. I can get you safely to the coast and arrange for a boat.'

'And how do I know that I can trust you?'

'You don't,' he said, laying his pistol on the table, 'but if I had wanted to kill you, then I could have done it by now.'

It was an offer which I could not refuse (43).

36

Two miles beyond the village, we were riding alongside what must have been the boundary wall of some large estate. As the ground rose a little and we could see beyond the wall, our eyes were met with a strange sight. There was a large house, separated from us by a long stretch of lawn. In the centre of the lawn, and, it seemed, floating in the air, was a huge round bag, made of some cloth, and brightly painted in many colours. Beneath it, and held to it by ropes, was a large basket. Hung between the bag and the basket was a metal brazier filled with burning charcoal.

'It is called a balloon,' said the Marquis. 'I believe that the hot air from the fire fills it and causes it to rise. In happier days, two brothers called Montgolfier flew such a balloon in the Tuileries Gardens.'

'You're telling me it flies, with men in it?'

He nodded. We needed a small miracle. Was the balloon the answer (38), or did I just pray that he could stay in that saddle for one more hour (41)?

37

By mid morning on Thursdays, the farm carts which had come into the city first were already on their way out again. Farmers from farther off were still coming in, and with so much traffic in and out, not too much time was spent in searching the carts or looking at papers.

We had chosen an entrance on the north side of the city, because it was usually the busiest, but as we came near to the barrier, I could see that we were not in luck. It was quiet. It was too late to turn back; we had already been seen.

I was dressed as a coachman, and driving a small coach and pair. The Marquis carried papers which gave his name as Henri Villechamp, a lawyer of Le Havre. He was dressed to look the part. We had chosen the profession of lawyer because, with so many trials, it was common for lawyers to be coming in and out of Paris.

I pulled up at the barrier and two soldiers came up to the coach. One took my papers, the other went to the door of the coach to examine those of the Marquis.

We had rehearsed the Marquis well – who he

had been defending, what the charges were, and the verdict. We had given him the names of all the people who he would be expected to know in the Paris courts. From what I could hear of the soldier's questions, he was not doing too well. He seemed to have forgotten most of what we had taught him.

I was beginning to get a little worried when I saw something which worried me even more – a face that I knew too well, or perhaps not the face, but the red eyebrows! The man was talking to two other soldiers and was not looking my way. They stopped talking. The man stayed where he was and the two soldiers began walking towards me.

The barrier across the road had been opened to let through an incoming cart. There was room for me to drive past it. I had no reason to think that the man with the eyebrows had recognised me, or that the soldiers coming towards me were interested in me or the Marquis, but I had to decide. Should I make a run for it (**40**), or should I wait (**42**)?

38

The few men who had been standing near the balloon had started to move back towards the house, leaving only one near to the balloon itself.

I turned to the Marquis.

'Your horse can clear that wall. Can you?'

'If the horse can, then I can!'

We jumped our horses together. The Marquis held on. We were near to the balloon before the man standing there had even seen us. He was going to give no trouble. At the sight of my pistol, he got down on his knees and begged me not to shoot. I told him to help the Marquis into the basket.

'How do you get it off the ground?' I asked.

'There are bags of sand in the basket, citizen. You throw them out until the balloon begins to rise.'

I jumped into the basket and began to throw out the bags of sand. The basket began to sway. Another bag went over the side, and the balloon began to lift into the air.

The men who had gone towards the house had started to run back, but too late. We were several

feet in the air. I leaned over the side and shouted.

'I'm sorry about your balloon, but I need it. You can keep the horses!'

We were above the house and still rising. I could see the coast to the north of us. The wind caught the balloon and we began to move sideways, away from the coast.

'How do you steer it?' I asked the Marquis.

He shook his head. I pulled on the ropes and threw out more sand, but there was no way that I could change its course. I could only keep the balloon in the air and let it take us where it would.

We rose straight through the clouds, so that I could no longer see the ground. Perhaps an hour had passed before I had used all of the charcoal on the fire and thrown out the last of the sand. The balloon was falling.

As we came down through the cloud, I could see a city beneath us. It was Paris! I could see the Seine and the towers of Notre Dame. Right below us was the Place de la Révolution!

39

While we were watching, I saw the soldiers appear at the other side of the village and ride off down the road. I thought it might be safe to try for the inn, if there was one.

The Marquis' coat and breeches were soaked in blood. I gave him my coat. It was long enough to cover the breeches.

I left him, nearby, while I took a look around. There was an inn. I found a boy cleaning out the stables and said that I had come to make certain there would be room for our horses. He said that there was plenty, and that there were no other visitors at the inn. It sounded as if it would be a good place to rest.

I could not hide the fact that the Marquis was ill. I said that he was a lawyer from Le Havre and that he had been taken ill quite suddenly as we were riding for Paris. I thought that it was no more than a slight fever and that he would be well enough to travel by the morning.

I put him to bed myself and the landlord's wife brought hot soup and a bottle of good French brandy.

The Marquis was soon sleeping. He really needed a surgeon, but the best that I could do for him now was to let him have some rest. So far, I had succeeded in hiding the fact that he was wounded and there was no reason for anyone to discover that until they came to put fresh sheets on the bed.

When I got to Le Havre, I still had to arrange for a boat. That might take a day, or even more. Le Havre was a busy port and was sure to have a good many soldiers in it. It could be that even if the Marquis had not been wounded, he would be safer waiting in this inn than somewhere in Le Havre itself.

The inn was quiet. Even if soldiers did come, they might not be too interested in a sick man. They had no reason to know that the Marquis had been shot. I decided to take the risk of riding on to Le Havre to make what arrangements I could for the boat. I should not be too long in returning to the inn (**44**).

40

I whipped up the horses and we were through the barrier before anyone knew what was happening. We had covered all of another two hundred yards before the first shots were fired.

I expected to hear the sound of horses behind us, but none came. Twice, I glanced back, but still the chase had not begun. It was not the time to wonder why, every yard that we covered being one yard nearer to freedom.

The road turned and we were out of sight of the city gate. A few hundred yards ahead was a rough track leading off the road and towards a wood. I had to get to that wood before our pursuers could spot us. I swung the horses onto the track. We reached the trees. I stopped only when I was sure that we were well hidden from the road. I now had to see to the Marquis.

A stray musket ball had passed through the flesh of his thigh and it was bleeding badly. I bound it up with his handkerchief and cravat. I took the two horses out of the shafts, helped the Marquis onto one and mounted the other myself.

We had to keep away from the roads and the

going was not easy. The Marquis' leg was still bleeding and he should have been resting, not riding. By evening, we were near to Rouen. I would have ridden on through the night to Le Havre, but the horses were tired and, though he had not complained, I knew that the Marquis needed rest.

I had a little food. Water, I took from a stream, and we spent the night in a wood.

Though it was late July, the next morning was cold. The Marquis' leg had stopped bleeding, but I knew that it would start again when we began to ride. By noon we were within an hour of the coast, though I didn't know whether the Marquis would last that hour.

We had stopped on a hilltop because he was again feeling faint; he had lost a great deal of blood. There was a village below us, and a road. A troop of soldiers was riding towards the village. I looked at the Marquis. Should I try to find shelter, nearby (39), or should I make him ride on (36)?

41

It was no use. The Marquis was game, but I could see that if I pressed him for much longer, he could be dead before we reached the coast.

Not far beyond the estate with its flying balloon was another road. I left the Marquis and his horse in the shelter of some bushes and rode off to see if I could find some better place where he might rest.

I was lucky. There was a small inn, no more than half a mile distant. It seemed quiet, and there were no soldiers about. I went back for the Marquis.

His coat and breeches were soaked in blood. I gave him my coat. It was long enough to hide the breeches. I got him into the inn.

My story was that the Marquis was a lawyer and that I was his clerk. We were on our way to Paris and he had been taken ill with a fever on the journey. He needed a bed. With warmth and rest he should be well enough to travel in the morning. Anyone looking at the Marquis could see that he was ill and the story was not questioned.

I got him to bed and the landlord's wife

brought hot soup and a bottle of good French brandy. I left him sleeping in the room and went downstairs to see that the landlord had stabled our horses.

There was no-one about, so I walked over to the stable. The horses were there, and looked to have been fed and watered. In the next stall was another horse. It was lathered in sweat and had been ridden hard.

When I got back to the inn, the landlord was there. I asked him how far we had ridden from Le Havre. He said six or seven miles. I told him that I must go back to our office and have a message sent to Paris that we had been delayed on our journey. In truth, I wanted to arrange for a boat to pick us up in the morning. I asked if we had any other visitors at the inn. He said not.

As I went back to tell the Marquis where I was going, I found myself thinking about that sweating horse. It could belong to one of the landlord's family. I would be saving time by going to Le Havre (44), but should I be staying with the Marquis (35)?

42

The two soldiers who had been walking towards us walked straight past. My papers were returned and I was waved on through the barrier. I could hardly believe our good fortune – but I was not going to give anyone the chance to change his mind. I whipped up the horses and we were through the barrier.

We were out of Paris and on the road to Le Havre. I should have been feeling pleased, but I was not. Things had gone well, almost too well. I had the feeling that we were very far from being out of danger.

The moment that we were well clear of the city, I pulled the horses off the road and onto a rough track that led to some woods. Under cover of the trees, I took the horses out of the shafts. The Marquis would ride one, I the other. We would make our way north across country, avoiding the roads as much as possible.

By evening, we were near to Rouen. I did not want to go into the city itself. We rode on a little further to a small, wayside inn.

I left the Marquis nearby and went up to the inn to take a good look around. I found a boy cleaning out the stables. I told him that I had come to make certain that there was room for our horses. He said that there was plenty and that they had no other visitors. It sounded a good place to spend the night.

The food was poor, but the room and the beds were clean. The Marquis slept well. I did little sleeping myself.

When we got to Le Havre, I had still to make arrangements for a boat. That might take a day, or even longer. Le Havre was a busy place and busy places usually meant soldiers. The inn seemed to be quiet and the Marquis could be safer there than waiting in Le Havre. I decided that I would leave early the next morning and ride on to Le Havre alone.

The Marquis had papers to show that he was a respectable French lawyer. If questioned, he had only to stick to that story. I would return by evening (**44**).

43

The red-headed man kept his part of the bargain. The Marquis was still not fit to ride and a coach took us to Le Havre on the following morning. A boat was arranged and all three of us landed in England on July 29th 1794.

The Marquis was taken to London to recover from his wound. The red-headed man kept his freedom and the right to remain in this country for as long as he wished, though I did hear that he had sailed for the Americas.

I still carry a personal letter from His Majesty, King George, thanking me for my part in the mission.

In the week following our landing in England, I spent a few days at Craystone Manor at the invitation of Lord Bredon.

Other than Lord Bredon himself, no-one in the household knew anything of where I had been or what I had been doing. I was beginning to forget, myself, until a sunny afternoon found me riding in the park once more with Arabella and Elizabeth.

'You remember,' said Arabella, 'the last time that you were here, asking about that man with the red beard and that awful shock of red hair?'

I said that I did.

'It was funny,' she went on. 'I think that the very day after you left, he just disappeared – went off without saying anything to anybody, without even collecting some money which was owing to him.'

'That is strange,' I said.

'We did see him,' said Elizabeth, 'the same day that you were here. I said that he looked like a spy, not that I've ever seen a spy, but if I had, I think that he would look like that. Do you think that spies look like spies?'

It was a good question, and one which I had never asked myself.

'I don't know,' I said, 'but I'm sure that they don't all have red hair.'

44

Tucked away in one of the alleys which run from the harbour at Le Havre is a ship's chandlers owned by a man called Dufray. While he did a good trade in ropes and canvas, he did an even better one in silk, brandy and tobacco which he smuggled across the Channel.

I told him what I wanted. He said that it would be difficult. There were soldiers everywhere. Business had been bad, a lot of his own trips had been cancelled, but the English smugglers were still coming over. He was sure that something could be arranged, though it might be expensive. I said that I would pay and he left me to see what could be done.

I waited for a full hour in the small back room of the shop. When the door of the room was opened again, it was not Dufray. With the light behind him, I did not, at first, recognise the man, though I could see the pistol in his hand.

He closed the door and sat himself on one of the canvas bales. He took off his white wig. The short hair was as red as the eyebrows.

'The Marquis de Sal is dead,' he said. 'It was not my doing; a troop of soldiers did it. Your Marquis was not a good liar. He tried to escape. He was shot. I'm sorry.'

I told him that I did not understand why he should be sorry.

'Because,' he said, 'I came to make you an offer, an offer which would have included your Marquis. There is news from Paris. Robespierre has been arrested and tried. He will go to the guillotine. When Danton was executed, many of those close to him went with him. I am Robespierre's man. My life is now in danger.'

'What is the offer?' I asked.

'A simple one. I will help you escape if you will take me with you. When we reach England, I want my freedom and to be allowed to stay in your country.'

'How do I know that I can trust you?'

'You don't,' he said, 'except that I could have shot you if I had wanted to.'

It was an offer I could not refuse.

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